Who designed the Buddhist flag?

By Dayananda Paranamana - Welletota, Palatuwa

In an article published under the topic of "Colonel-Olcott-the great Buddhist revivalist" in the Sunday Observer of February 17 2002, the writer had mentioned that Col.Olcott was the designer of the famous Buddhist flag. This idea is utterly wrong according to the most authentic historical sources. It is true that the need of a Buddhist flag was first understood by Col.Olcott and Rev Mohottiwatte Gunananda thero in order to hoist it on the Vesak full moon day of 28 April 1885, that the then government declared the Vesak full moon day as a statutory holiday. It was a victory of Col.Olcott as a leader of the Buddhist campaign to win these Buddhist demands.A board was appointed to design a suitable Buddhist flag. The members of this panel consisted of venerable Hikkaduve Sri Sumangala (as the chief of the board) William de Abrew, Don Carolis Hewavitharana, Peter de Abrew, Lansage Don Andiris Perera Dharmagunawardene, Charls A. de Silva, N.S. Fernando, William Fernando, and Carolis Poojitha Goonawardene (as the secretary of the board). Among these members Carolis Poojitha Goonawardene designed and produced the Buddhist flag to the board and was accepted. During this period Col.Olcott had gone abroad and he was in India. He was invited to participate in this august ceremony. After arriving in Sri Lanka. What he did was only to shorten the Buddhist flag by both sides saying that the flag was too long in its size. That is the historical truth. Why do we hesitate to give the devil his due ? Vide: Lankawe Bauddha Punarudaya (1985) by K.D.K. Wimalarathne. Sasanika Jatika Veerayo, (1987 p 28) by the most venerable Madihe Pannasiha Maha Nayaka Thero. Vesak Niwaduwa ha Bauddha Kodiya (1985) by Gonahene Jotipala. Nawa Maha Wamsaya hewath Sinhala Aryayo, (1990-p-116) by G.H. de Zoysa. Lamani Mahima (1999-p-31) by D.V. Richard de Silva.